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Viewpoint: Criminalizing the Victim Is No Road to Justice.

Michael Vick, seeing the opponent closing in, has punted. His friends rolled over and he copped a plea. So now what? According to speculation, Vick faces a paltry year in jail and, what is for him, a laughable \$250,000 fine. One can only hope that his case is vigorously pursued in the state of Virginia, where he will face cruelty charges, which is what this really should be about.

Of course, there is no penalty so vigorous that it will undo the violence he has inflicted or restore life to the dogs that he has so brutally killed. Sadly, Vick is only one of thousands upon thousands of damaged people who enjoy torturing animals as a means to inflate their egos, earn money, or to provide some lurid, adrenalin-charged entertainment.

The “sport” of dog fighting and all of the acts that go along with it – the brutality toward the dogs; the use of weaker animals as “bait”; the agony inflicted in the fighting pit; the execution-style killing of dogs – cannot be described by any reasonable person as anything less than horrific abuse.

Whether or not you love animals, this is a serious concern. Animal abusers are five times more likely to commit violent crimes against people and four times more likely to commit property crimes. Of course, The FBI has recognized the connection since the 1970s, when its analysis of the lives of serial killers suggested that most had killed or tortured animals as children.

Dog fighters are not nice people. A typical dog fighter is also active in such crimes as gang activity, domestic violence, armed robbery, drug trafficking, and child endangerment. **Countless children, routinely exposed to this culture, are being indoctrinated into lives of violent and criminal behavior.**

And what of the dogs? They are, after all, the innocent and helpless victims in this sorry tale. What will become of them? The most likely scenario is that they, in a similar fate to the dogs that were tortured and killed, will also die alone and afraid in the shelters where they have been housed since being taken from Vick’s property last month.

Ironically, while Michael Vick has pled guilty to killing dogs because they wouldn’t fight, these same dogs will likely be killed because someone thinks that they might. They will have been “saved” only to fall victim once again, this time to a system that places little value on their lives. Although their method of execution will certainly not be as horrific, the end result is death just the same.

The only difference in the lives of the thousands of pet pit bull dogs living happily with

their families and the lives of the dogs suffering in dire circumstances is the hands into which they fell. A cruel twist of fate or a blessing from above, all depending on in whose yard the dog sits.

The American Pit Bull Terrier, once beloved as America's favorite dog, has become an unwitting participant in the ultimate game of "blame the victim." **Each time he is assassinated by the media or banned by politicians, he is made more and more attractive to the very individuals who have no business owning any dog at all. As the debate about the pit bull rages on, the dog continues to suffer and, in the process of debating, we have managed to strip him of his canineness, until he is no longer allowed to be what he is; simply, a dog; four legs, two eyes, one heart.**

The dogs are unequivocally the victims in this sorry state of affairs. It is unconscionable, unproductive and irrational to blame the victims and such deceptive redirection is not to be tolerated. **Justice will *never be served* through criminalization and regulation of the victim.** Blaming a dog for the way he is handled is akin to blaming a car for the way it is driven.

If Michael Vicks' dogs and the countless others who fall victim to human cruelty are not to have died in vain, then **it is incumbent upon every one of us to rise up and, in no uncertain terms, demand a crackdown on those who have made victims of all of us; our children, our dogs, our communities.**

It is high time we hold the real villain, the reckless and criminal owner of ANY dog, accountable.

Michael Vick is personification of our failure, in the words of Harriet Beecher Stowe, "to take the side of the weak against the strong". In American eyes, there is no greater injustice, and our eyes have been irrevocably opened. **The pit bull then is the perfect mascot for our newly united stand against animal cruelty.**

★ Viewpoint: Michael Vick & Dog Fighting

A Voice for the Victims

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